

*Notes on Chirānd in the District of Sāran.*—By NUNDOLAL DEY,

*Subordinate Judge of Jessore.*

[Read June, 1903.]

Chirānd is six miles to the east of Chupra. It is situated on the bank of the river Saraju. The Ganges formerly flowed past the town. Sir William Hunter in 1877 placed Chirānd on the Ganges.<sup>1</sup> The old dry bed of the Ganges still exists immediately to the south of Chupra, and beyond it runs the Saraju. The Sone and the Saraju now join the Ganges at Singhi, two miles to the east of Chirānd.

Chirānd must at one time have been a celebrated place to have lent its name to Chupra, which is often called Chiran-Chupra by the people of other districts, Chiran being an abbreviation of the word Chirānd. Extensive mounds of earth, said to be the remains of an ancient fort, still exist at this place, and the hermitage of Rishi Chyavana and two very small tanks called Jiāch Kundu and Brahma Kundu in the *Chirānd-Māhātmya*, situated at different portions of the site of the fort, are pointed out as vestiges of the ancient Hindu period. A fair takes place every year on the last day of the month of Kārttik at the spot which is called Chyavana-āsrama.

Chirānd is popularly known as the capital of king Mayūradhvaja, and the tradition still exists that he and his queen sawed down their son in order to satisfy the craving for human flesh of Siva who came to the king in the disguise of an old Brāhman to test his generosity and charitable feeling for which he was celebrated, though he was afterwards restored to life by the satisfied god. But the tradition differs from the story given in the *Jaimini-Bhārata*<sup>2</sup> which places the capital of Mayūradhvaja at Ratnapura, near the Nerbuda, and relates that Krishna in the disguise of an old Brāhman came to the king and told him that his only

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. XI, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Chapters 45 and 46.

son while coming to the town to marry the daughter of Krishna Sarmā, the priest of the king, was carried away by a lion which promised to release him in case he obtained the right half of Mayūradhvaja's body. Mayūradhvaja promised to give the right side of his body, and his head was cut off by his wife and his son Tāmradhvaja, by means of a saw (*ārā*), as preliminary to sever the right side of his body ; but the old Brāhman seeing that tears were trickling down the left eye of the severed head, refused to accept the right side of the body as, he stated, it was not given freely but in anguish, whereupon the severed head replied that the left side cried because it would perish uselessly without being of any service to a Brāhman. Krishna became highly satisfied with the answer : he revealed himself and restored the body to its former condition. Though the tradition may differ from the real story, yet the fact remains that in Chirānd there is a tradition that someone's body was cut off at this place and that in connection with some religious notion.

Four temples have been built on the high mound of earth, which was the site of the ancient fort, on account of the sanctity of the place, containing the images of Rāmachandra and Krishna.

Dr. Hoey has identified Chirānd with the ancient Vaisali,<sup>1</sup> and he has given his reasons for such identification. There can be no doubt, however, that Chirānd was an ancient Buddhist town, for images of Buddha and other figures of the Buddhistic period have been exhumed from this place from time to time. I myself obtained there three figures when I visited it in May, 1902. I found them all stowed away in a corner of one of the temples called *Aini Rāma-Kā-Maṭhiā*, and I was told that they had been obtained while digging the earth. One was the figure of Buddha in a meditative posture made of white marble ; the second, a small figure of a woman holding a lotus made of basaltic stone ; and the third, also a small figure of a woman but much worn out, made of red sandstone.

At the time of Buddha the river Ganges was the boundary between the two kingdoms of Vaisali and Magadha, Vaisali being situated on the northern side of the river and Magadha on the southern. The capital of the kingdom of Vaisali was also called Vaisali, and the capital of Magadha was Pātaliputra. It is related in Buddhist works that Ānanda, the favourite disciple and cousin of Buddha and the second patriarch of the Buddhist hierarchy after Buddha's death, entered into *Nirvāṇa* while he was crossing the river Ganges on his way from Magadha to Vaisali. After his death his body was divided into two equal parts :

<sup>1</sup> Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. LXIX,—*Identification of Kusinara, Vaisali and other places.*

one part was taken by Ajātasatru, king of Magadha, and the other by the Licchavis of Vaisali, and the latter built a tower over half the body at a place called Kūṭāgāra, or, as it was called, Mahāvana-Kūṭāgāra,<sup>1</sup> the northern suburb of the town of Vaisali. This tower was visited by Fa Hian in the fifth century,<sup>2</sup> and by Hinen Tsiang in the seventh century.<sup>3</sup>

The etymology of Chirānd and the aforesaid tradition of Mayūradhvaja's son being sawed down into two portions at this place, and the fact that it was the site of an ancient Buddhist town, point out that it was the place where the tower was built over half the body of Ānanda. The word Chirānd is composed of two words: *Chir* and *Ānd*. *Chir* means a portion cut off, and *Ānd* is a contraction or corruption of Ānanda, and hence the word Chirānd means *a portion cut off from Ānanda's body*. Chirānd therefore may be identified with the ancient Kūṭāgāra or Mahāvana-Kūṭāgāra, the northern suburb of Vaisali. But the difficulty of such identification is apparent. Vaisali has been identified by General Cunningham with Basarh<sup>4</sup> on the left bank of the Gandak in the district of Muzaffarpur (Tirhut), though it should be observed that the river Gandak is not mentioned in connection with Vaisali either by Fa Hian or Hiuen Tsiang: the latter says that he crossed the Ganges in order to reach Vaisali from Drona-stupa which has been identified with Degwāra. If Vaisali be Basarh, then certainly Chirānd cannot be the northern suburb of Vaisali, as Chirānd is situated about twenty-four miles to the south-west of Basarh. Mr. Carlleyle identifies the mounds of ancient ruins at Chirānd with the Drona or Kumbha stupa which was said to have been built by the Brāhman Drona over the vessel or *kumbha* with which he divided the relics of Buddha into eight equal portions, each of which was equal to one *drona* in measure, and he supposes that *Chir* of the word Chirān refers to the division of the remains of Buddha.<sup>5</sup> But there is much that is reasonable, at least worthy of the consideration of the archæologist, in the argument advanced by Dr. Hoey in identifying Chirānd with Vaisali, though it goes against the accepted identification of Vaisali with Basarh. There are big earthen

<sup>1</sup> Beal's *Travels of Fah Hian and Sung-yun*, Chap. XXV, Bigandet's *Life of Gantama*, Chap. XI, and *Chullavagga*, ch. v, sec. 13 and ch. x, sec. 1. *The Pilgrimage of Fa Hian from the French edition of the Foe Koue Ki* (1848): "Thence proceeding five *yeou yan* to the east, you come to the kingdom of *Phi she li*. Here are a great forest [*Mahāvana*] and a chapel of two stories [*Kūṭāgāra*]; it was one of the stations of Foe, and here you see the *Tower of half of the body of Ānanda*."

<sup>2</sup> Beal's *Fo-Kwo-Ki*, Chapters XXV and XXVI.

<sup>3</sup> Beal's *Records of Western Countries*, Book VII.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ancient Geography of India*, page 443.

<sup>5</sup> Archæological Report, Vol. XXII, p. 79.

mounds in Telpā which is two miles to the south-east of Chupra, one of which may be the remains of the *tower of the bows and deposited arms*, as Dr. Hoey supposes the village to have been the site of the ancient Chāpāla. This part of the country therefore ought to be thoroughly explored, and there can be no doubt that the exploration would yield some results of great archæological interest.

Whether Chirānd was the ancient Mahāvana-Kūṭāgāra or not, there can be no doubt that even in its ruins it must have been a celebrated place as to have attracted the attention of Sultan Abul Muzaffar Husain Shah who built a beautiful mosque, now in ruins, upon a portion of the remains of the ancient fort or mounds in 909 Hijri, corresponding to 1503 A.C. The inscription on the mosque was noticed by Dr. Blochmann in 1874.<sup>1</sup> The Sultan would not certainly have constructed the mosque at this place had it not been considered to be a sacred place by the Hindus.

<sup>1</sup> Blochmann's *Geography and History of Bengal*, No. II, in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal of 1874, page 304.